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# THE LEATHER DISTRICT

City of Boston

Kevin H. White, Mayor

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Robert J. Ryan, Director



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# THE LEATHER DISTRICT



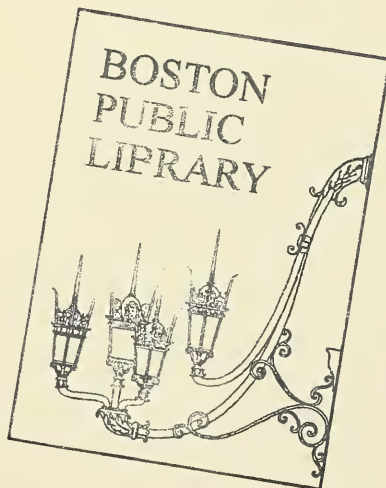
## A REVITALIZATION PLAN: APRIL 1980

Kevin H. White, Mayor  
City of Boston

Robert J. Ryan, Director  
Boston Redevelopment Authority

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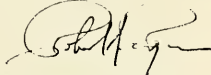
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Revitalizing the Leather District will be an essential building block in the development of the Downtown over the next decade.

The following report builds on the objectives which the City has for the Downtown, including economic growth, neighborhood preservation and balanced development. It recommends the retention and re-use of buildings for primarily office and light manufacturing purposes. Mixed residential/commercial use is recommended as a vehicle to preserve those smaller buildings of lower commercial value meet some of the needs of the contiguous Chinese Community. New office development is to be encouraged in appropriate redevelopment sites.

This report is an important first step in our revitalization strategy in that it provides an opportunity for interested parties to review our recommendations. We feel this will help foster the public and private cooperation that is essential to the future growth of the Leather District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. J. Ryan", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert J. Ryan  
Director

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The Leather District is located adjacent to a number of the City's major proposed development projects such as South Station, New Essex Street, Downtown Crossing and Lafayette Place. It is essential that the planning of all these projects proceed concurrently.

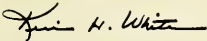
The report on the Leather District identifies the various trends which are taking place and recommends a commercial revitalization strategy which could build on the opportunities and strengths which we see for this area.

These strengths include developer and owner interest in preserving the existing historic commercial buildings by upgrading the space for office, light manufacturing and mixed residential uses, as well as new development in appropriate locations. These changes will lead to increased employment, taxes and commercial activity in the Downtown.

In addition, the Leather District is a prime area for the possible expansion of the Chinese community which is in need of new options for development. Mixed residential development and additional manufacturing enterprises in the Leather District could meet Chinatown's pressing need for housing and employment, yet preserve the commercial character of the Leather District.

The joint cooperation of the public and private sector in all the affected communities is essential in reviewing the recommendations and adopting an implementation strategy outlined in this report. I look forward to your participation in this process.

Sincerely,



Kevin H. White  
Mayor





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This report was prepared by the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Planning Department, Philip Zeigler, Director; Laurence K. Koff, Downtown Planner and principal author. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by many property owners, tenants and realtors in providing information and reviewing various drafts.

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# 1. Introduction

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The Leather District, a nine-block area of 19th century brick warehouse structures located between Dewey Square and Kneeland Street, has for the past twenty years been undergoing significant changes. During this time, vacant warehouse space has been filled by a variety of commercial and residential tenants. Additionally, various large-scale development projects have been proposed nearby at Dewey Square and South Station. These changes have the potential to either preserve and reinforce or significantly alter the commercial and architectural character of the area. Clearly, a plan and implementation program is needed to stimulate and guide the district's revitalization.

Recognizing this need, planning staff at the BRA responsible for downtown planning, commercial and neighborhood preservation, research, transportation, urban design and zoning have worked together to analyze and evaluate the district's problems and opportunities.

As a part of this process, meetings have been held with the Lincoln Street Associates, a group of property owners in the Leather District, to discuss their concerns.

The report which follows is a product of the preceding efforts. It describes the issues and changes which are taking place, states a range of goals which various interest groups have for the district, reviews three alternative land use strategies, and recommends, on the basis of various planning criteria, a concept plan and series of implementation programs.

The proposed concept plan and analysis is being presented for review by property owners, tenants and other concerned groups. After a thorough discussion of the issues and recommendations, the report will be modified where appropriate so that an implementation strategy can then be pursued.



## 2. Summary

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The Leather District contains approximately 2.4 million square feet of building space. A land use survey in 1978 estimated that this space was allocated to the following uses: 800,000 sq.ft. warehouse, office and storage; 400,000 sq.ft. office; 275,000 sq.ft. residential (primarily the Hotel Essex); 525,000 sq.ft. light manufacturing (primarily Teradyne); 200,000 sq.ft. vacant; and the balance retail, parking and other uses.

An analysis of the changes which were taking place in the district indicated five major concerns:

1. changing land use
2. meeting the needs of the Chinese community
3. preserving the physical character of the district
4. improving circulation and parking, and
5. upgrading the public infrastructure

A review of these issues highlights their inter-relationship and the need for a strategy which addresses these problems in a coherent manner.

Land use changes are a central concern to owners and tenants in the Leather District. In recent years, more than one half of the existing space has been converted from leather to electronics manufacturing, office and mixed residential/commercial occupancy. Approximately one million square feet of ware-

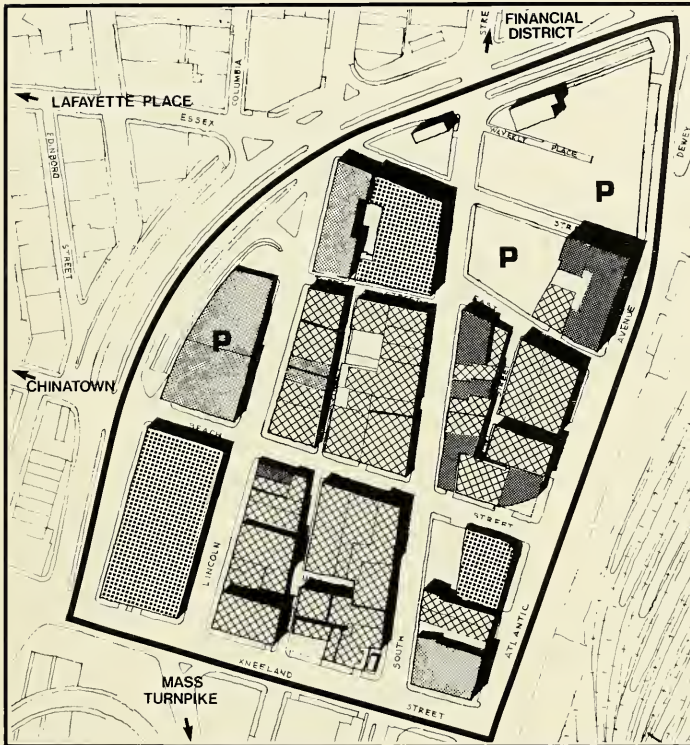
house space remains (Map 1). Currently, there is significant pressure to convert much of this space to mixed residential/commercial use. A change to residential occupancy requires approval by the Board of Appeal since this use is not allowed by right in an area such as the Leather District which is zoned for light manufacturing. In addition, a number of buildings in Dewey Square were recently demolished to prepare a redevelopment site. These conversion, re-use and redevelopment trends are continuing without any coherent plan.

A second issue in the Leather District concerns the Chinese community, which is being affected by various downtown development projects. Its need for space to accommodate commercial and manufacturing firms as well as residential occupants is compatible with the emerging mix of land uses.





Third, without the adoption of a formal preservation policy and a set of preservation guidelines for the district, it will not be possible to ensure that facade changes are compatible with the district and that owners will have an incentive to maintain and upgrade their property. A review of the architectural character of the district's building confirms the importance of most of the properties, as well as the scale of the district.

Two additional issues, changes to the present system of circulation and parking and implementation of needed public improvements, lighting, sidewalks, etc., must be taken into account in any effort to revitalize the Leather District.

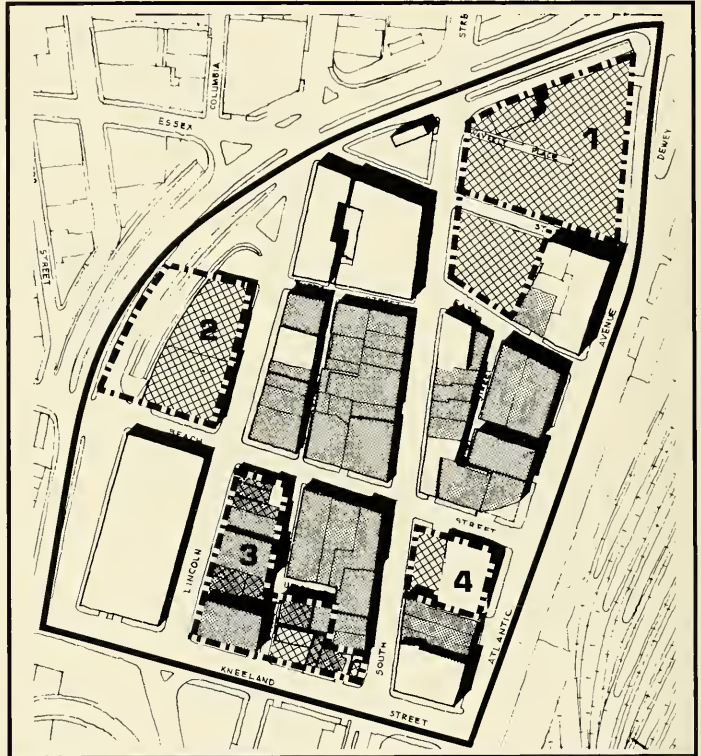









## 1 Existing Land Use

-  Manufacturing
-  Wholesale (Office/Storage)
-  Office
-  Residential/Commercial
- P Parking





-  Maximum Build
-  Infill Build
-  Reuse
-  Infill or Reuse
-  Retain As Is

## 2 Land Use Strategies

In summary, the major problems as well as opportunities for the district relate to preparing a strategy for upgrading approximately one million square feet of vacant or underutilized space. This strategy will have to achieve a balance between residential and commercial land uses and stimulate in the process both preservation, and new development activities, as well as parking, circulation and public improvement activities.

Three alternative land reuse and build strategies, Maximum, Infill and Minimum Build, were identified as shown on the table below.

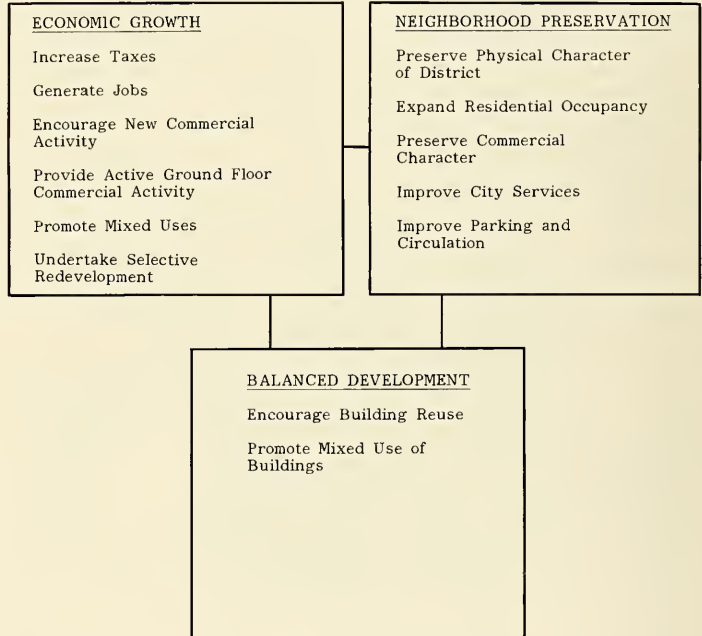
For each of these strategies, the total amount of square footage of existing warehouse space which could be utilized for mixed residential, commercial, office or manufacturing occupancy and which might result from redevelopment activities has been identified (Table 7). As shown on Map 2, the Maximum Build option contains four development parcels (#'s 1-4), the Infill Build option contains two development parcels (#'s 1-2) and two smaller infill parcels (#'s 3-4), and the Minimum Build option contains only one development parcel (#1).

Activity	Maximum Build/ Reuse (Sq.Ft.)	Infill Build/ Reuse (Sq.Ft.)	Minimum Build/ Reuse (Sq.Ft.)
Reuse of existing space	651,000	934,000	1,091,000
New Development (parcels 1, 4)	2,900,000	1,800,000	1,000,000
TOTAL	3,551,000	2,734,000	2,091,000



TABLE 1

GOALS FOR THE LEATHER DISTRICT





These strategies were then evaluated in terms of the district's primary goals identified in Table 1: Economic Growth, Balanced Development, and Neighborhood Preservation. An appropriate revitalization strategy must stimulate economic development (jobs, taxes) while at the same time preserving the commercial character of the area. These twin goals can be achieved through adopting a balanced development program which promotes both the re-use of space and limited new development.

Achieving these goals requires that a land use strategy take into account the demand for space and the market price (economic feasibility) for the various proposed land uses. Thus, the various land use strategies, Maximum, Infill and Minimum Build and Reuse, were also evaluated in terms of these factors.

### 3. Conclusions

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1. A preservation strategy which promotes economic growth and balanced development can be achieved because of the growing demand for converting under-utilized warehouse building space to office, manufacturing and mixed residential/commercial occupancy.

- The commercial expansion of the downtown, which will require an additional 1.2m sq.ft. of class B/C office space over the next 5 years, and the growth of manufacturing of which some 3.8m sq.ft. are needed in the next 10 years, require that the preponderant amount of under-utilized space in the Leather District be upgraded

to class B/C office and manufacturing occupancy. This commercial occupancy provides the city with the jobs and taxes which its growth requires.

- The positive impacts of mixed residential/commercial occupancy (increased taxes which are comparable to those generated by buildings up-graded for Class B/C office use, building renovation, mixed use) make this an appropriate strategy for those buildings of lower commercial value, the smaller warehouse structures without passenger elevators.
  - While there is sufficient demand for converting all of the Leather District building space to mixed residential/commercial use, this occupancy will not retain the commercial character of the area and it does not adequately provide for the employment and business service space needs of the Downtown. In addition, not all buildings are suitable for such residential/commercial use.
2. New office development can take place without destroying the scale and physical character of the district on two key parcels, the vacant Dewey Square site and the Lincoln Street garage parcel, as well as a number of infill parcels, primarily on Lincoln/Kneeland Street.
- Because of the density and market for new office construction, the taxes and revenues generated by this far exceed other commercial or residential land uses.

- The value of the Lincoln Street garage for redevelopment will increase because of two proposed improvements, the South Station parking garage and the closing of a portion of the northbound surface artery, widening in the process the surface dimensions of the parcel. In addition, the design of the garage structure conflicts with the architectural character of the district.



- The infill sites on Lincoln/Kneeland Street contain 1-3 story structures of no architectural significance which are in fair/poor condition.
  - Pursuing other possible redevelopment parcels in the leather district is not necessary because of the availability of other sites in the downtown. Additionally, large-scale demolition and redevelopment would have a negative impact upon the character of the district.
3. Concurrent with the adoption of a concept land use plan is the need for related preservation, parking and circulation, and public improvements plans and programs.
  4. The revitalization of the Leather District will require a public/private partnership in adopting and implementing a land use and related preservation, parking and circulation, and public improvement plans and programs.
  5. Efforts by the City to preserve the existing buildings for commercial and residential use and encourage manufacturing enterprises would address the needs of the Chinese community.
  6. Because of the high costs and unavailability of buildings within the Leather District at this time, sites for subsidized housing to serve the needs of Chinatown can most appropriately be located elsewhere. Opportunities for subsidized housing serving Chinatown are presently being pursued on land owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.
- Various public incentives are available and will have to be utilized to stimulate the revitalization of space for office and manufacturing purposes.
  - Investment and promotion by the private sector will be required to attract an appropriate mix of investment in upgrading and converting property to alternative uses.

## 4. Recommendations Next Steps

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- I. The following criteria should be utilized in identifying the reuse of space for various purposes:

location, building type, mixed use zoning and preservation.

**LOCATION.** The Leather District is bounded by three major traffic arteries: Atlantic Avenue, Surface Artery and Kneeland Street. The proposed development at South Station of an inter-modal transportation terminal and the construction of various proposed circulation improvements will reinforce the importance of these arteries. It is suggested, therefore, that revitalization of properties in these areas be limited to redevelopment or renovation for manufacturing or commercial occupancy.

**BUILDING SIZE AND IMPROVEMENTS.** Buildings under 5,000 square feet without passenger elevators and with street-side loading are difficult to utilize fully for manufacturing or office occupancy (Map 1). As indicated by conversion of the A.S. Burg Building (three floors of office, two floors of residential), these small buildings provide opportuni-

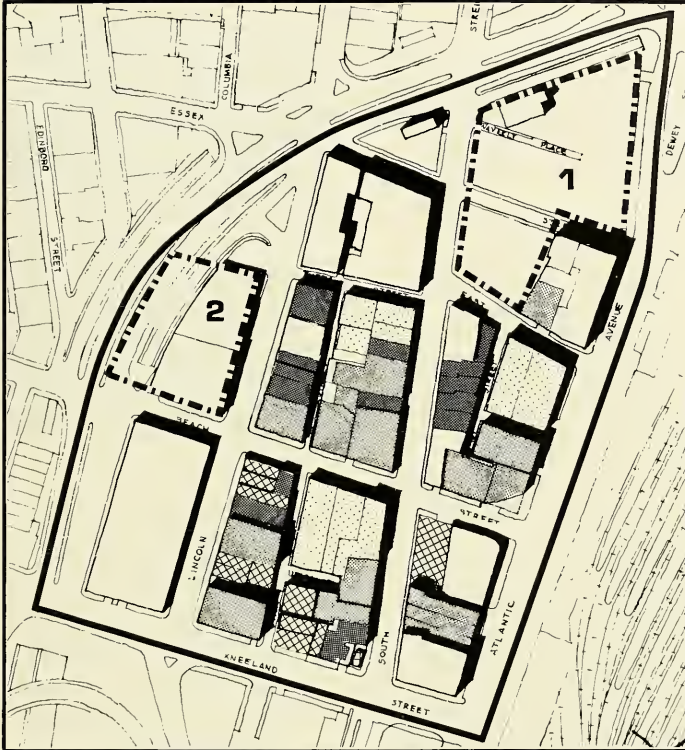
ties for mixed residential/commercial occupancy.







**MIXED USE ZONING.** Related to the above criteria for segregating uses by building size is the concept of reserving ground floors for commercial occupancy and upper floors for residential use. If the commercial character of the area is to be enhanced then street-level space, basement and first floor, must be utilized for commercial purposes. Residential occupancy could then begin on those floors which are inaccessible for commercial occupancy.

Wherever possible, the second and third floors should therefore be utilized for commercial purposes.

**PRESERVATION.** A review of the district's architectural character (Map 6) indicates that the area is composed of clusters of buildings which are of significance either because of their architectural detailing or the form and scale which they contribute to the district. In addition, because the properties bordering Kneeland and Lincoln Streets are of lesser importance for preservation, they could be considered for infill development.





-  New Development - Class A Office
-  Infill Redevelopment - Class A Office
-  Reuse - Class B/C Office
-  Reuse - Mixed Residential/Retail
-  Reuse - Manufacturing
-  Retain Existing Use

### 3 Concept Plan

TABLE 2  
INFILL CONCEPT PLAN  
RECOMMENDATION (SQ. FT.)

Land Use Strategy	New Office	Reuse				Total
		Manuf.	Office B/C	Retail	Resid.	
New Development	1,550,000					1,550,000
Infill Development	250,000					250,000
Reuse		250,000	504,000	59,400	80 units (120,600)	934,000
	1,800,000	250,000	504,000	59,400	120,600	2,734,000

2. An Infill Reuse Strategy (Map 3, Table 2) should be pursued because it will stimulate compatible new development and the preservation of the City's most homogeneous collection of 19th century commercial architecture.
  - Mixed residential/retail occupancy is proposed for those buildings (14 buildings, @ 80 dwelling units) which are under 5,000 square feet in size without passenger elevators. This number of units represents approximately 16% of the total number of dwellings (487) which would result if all feasible buildings in the Leather District were converted to mixed residential/commercial occupancy. Either number of units is a small proportion of the total demand in the downtown which now exists for residential occupancy.
  - Manufacturing occupancy is proposed in two of the three largest buildings (total of 250,000 square feet). These buildings represent a unique resource, outside of various public industrial development projects such as the Crosstown, Boston Marine Industrial Park, Charlestown Navy Yard, for providing well-located industrial space which will meet the City's projected demand for such space.
  - Class B/C office use is proposed for the remaining underutilized space (504,000 sq. ft. in 16 buildings). This represents 40% of the demand over the next 5 years for class B/C space. But since many of the existing commercial tenants will remain, a smaller percentage of this demand will actually be available for upgrading. The Leather District is a desirable downtown location for meeting this need.
  - New development for office use is recommended for two parcels (the Lincoln Street garage and Dewey Square parcel) where some 1,500,000 square feet of building space could be constructed.
  - Infill development for office use is proposed on a number of small-





ler sites where 250,000 square feet of buildings space could be constructed. A total of 1.8m square feet of new office space represents 27% of the demand over the next 15 years for this occupancy.

- Retain as is the balance of 1.4 million square feet of building space (property owned by Teradyne, Essex Hotel, etc.) in its present use and rehabilitate where appropriate.
- 3. A public/private partnership of City staff and private owners, tenants and relevant community groups would be organized to review the report and assist in directing its implementation.
- Particular emphasis in this process will have to be placed on Atlantic Avenue where building owners will be most greatly affected by the South Station development and on Kneeland and Lincoln Streets where a viable infill de-

velopment parcel should be delineated.

- Community groups from both Chinatown and the Leather District should be involved in the review of this report.
- 4. The BRA should, after the community review of this report, finalize a Concept Land Use Plan similar to Map 3 and Table 2.
- The concept plan identifies a specific land use strategy of preservation and development as well as a mix of land uses (office, manufacturing, retailing, residential).
- The plan should be viewed as a set of guidelines to direct where possible future land use changes and upgrading of the environment.
- It should not be considered a blue print for the future which cannot, where appropriate, be modified.
- 5. The Zoning Board of Appeal should continue to review requests for residential conversion on a case-by-case basis.
- The concept plan should provide the Zoning Board of Appeal a framework for evaluating requests for zoning changes, particularly those proposing mixed residential/retail occupancy.

6. Additional improvement strategies discussed in this report pertaining to preservation, public works and city services, circulation and parking should be finalized after agreement on a land use strategy.

- Plans and programs which pertain to these issues should be adopted and implemented.



7. A consultant study of Dewey Square/Essex Street which is now under way should be coordinated with the evaluation of various issues in the Leather District.

- The Dewey Square II consultant study is concerned primarily with traffic circulation in Dewey Square and along Essex Street west to Lafayette Place, the configuration of various development parcels which result from street changes, and a public improvement plan (street lighting, etc.) in Dewey Square. Because of the inter-relationship of the Leather District with Dewey Square, the consultant study will include a development feasibility analysis of the Lincoln Street garage parcel, an evaluation of the impact of circulation improvements, and a recommended program of public improvements.

8. Various public and private programs as identified below should be utilized to implement the preceding planning strategies.

- BRA South Station Planning Budget.  
The South Station Urban Renewal Project budget has a small balance of which a portion is being used to fund the Dewey Square II/Essex Street planning study. The Leather District is located outside of the South Station urban renewal boundaries. Issues outside the project area which are affected by actions within the urban renewal project, such as traffic impacts resulting from a new Essex Street on Atlantic Avenue and South Street, can be included in these planning studies.
- Federal Grant and Loan Programs.  
Both the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have various grant and loan programs which the City can use to undertake necessary public improvements and site preparation activities. Additionally these agencies have programs which can provide loans to local development corporations and private owners to assist in the acquisition or upgrading of this property for commercial and residential purposes.
- National Register Designation.  
If the Leather District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, property owners would be able to use accelerated depreciation in writing off the cost of improvements made to their property. This tax benefit would provide an incentive for property rehabilitation.

- City Capital Budget. The City has a capital budget which provides a schedule for public improvements. In the absence of Federal assistance, the City's capital budget would offer an opportunity to schedule various proposed improvements, such as new utilities and sidewalks.
- State Commercial Loan Program. Plans are underway to designate the Leather District as a Commercial Area Revitalization District (CARD) area. Owners of properties within these districts are eligible for a variety of assistance. Tax-exempt revenue bonds can be utilized for the acquisition or renovation of property or capital equipment. Mortgage insurance is available in order to assist owners in obtaining financing; and the job incentive program is available to pay owners for employing residents of adjacent residential areas.
- Zoning Board of Appeal. Since residential use is conditionally allowed, the Zoning Board of Appeal will play a key role in adopting a concept plan for the Leather District. The Board must review and approve all residential conversion. The Board, therefore, should review and comment on the proposed concept plan identified on Map 3 and Table 2.



## 5. Analysis/Issues

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### Land Use Changes

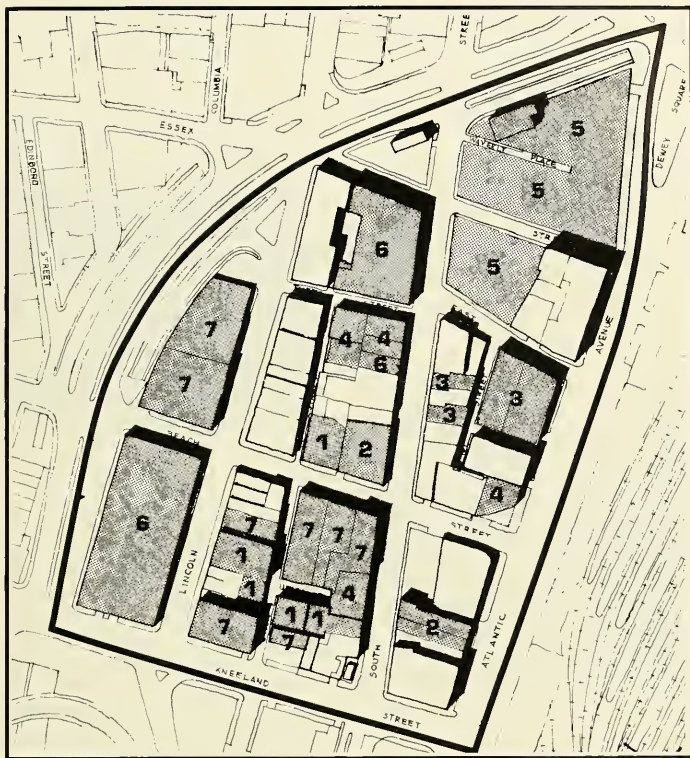
1. LAND USE CHANGES. The estimated square footage of building space occupied by various land uses as of 1978 is indicated on Table 3. Storage and office warehouse use (primarily leather-related) account for some 34% of the building space. Light manufacturing occupies 21.5%, residential (primarily the Essex Hotel) 11%, retail and other 9% of the occupied space. The vacancy rate in 1978 was estimated to be 8%.

Until recently, most property owners (Map 4) in the Leather District were considering holding their property for office redevelopment. Between 1971 and 1976 only 5 properties were sold. The high costs of carrying this property, the lack of any current demand for acquisition for redevelopment for office or some other use, such as an arena, and the increasing pressure for building preservation and reuse is creating conditions where many of the smaller property owners are now selling their property. In the past three years, eight properties were sold compared to five sales between 1971-1976. The significant shifts in land uses are

indicated by Tables 3 and 4. Between 1976 and 1978, the vacancy rate and amount of square footage devoted to warehousing decreased; manufacturing, office and residential uses increased. Related to these changes is a 50% increase in total floor space in the District which will result from the construction of a proposed office tower at Dewey Square.

These land use changes are reflected in the analysis of the 13 sales during the period 1971-1979.

- a. MANUFACTURING. Two sales of property to manufacturing occupants include: Advanced Electronics, which purchased the former Barron Anderson Building on Atlantic Avenue, and a Fortune Cookie manufacturer located on Lincoln Street.
- b. REDEVELOPMENT. Two parcels for redevelopment were part of the purchases made by Rose Associates in assembling the Dewey Square parcel.
- c. WAREHOUSE. Four of the thirteen sales were for warehouse uses:



- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 ___ Adams     | 5 ___ Rose, Assoc. |
| 2 ___ Berman    | 6 ___ Teradyne     |
| 3 ___ Elmwood   | 7 ___ York         |
| 4 ___ Eisenberg | ___ Individuals    |

#### 4 Major Owners



1. leather tenants
  2. kitchen supplies (Chinese owned)
  3. warehouse and retail sales of office supplies
  4. Teradyne storage
- d. MIXED RESIDENTIAL/COMMERCIAL. Residential/ commercial occupancy accounted for 3 of the 13 sales; two of the three sales occurred in the past year, indicating the significant interest in this land use.

The shift in land use results from changes in the demand for space (i.e., less interest in leather warehousing, more interest in light manufacturing, residential, redevelopment) which is reflected in the sales value of property. As indicated in Table 4, average sales price of property between 1971 and 1979 is \$6.32 per square foot. The price paid for redevelopment, manufacturing and mixed residential was at least \$3.00 higher per square foot (\$8.24 vs. \$5.39) than the average sales price of office or warehouse use.

The highest per square foot prices paid for buildings were for redevelopment (the Rose Office parcel) \$8.82, manufacturing \$8.33, and mixed residential/commercial occupancy \$8.24.

The prices paid for office and warehouse use were below the average: \$5.39 and \$3.10, respectively.

Although a review of recent sales indicates the continued demand for commercial use of Leather District property,



this demand does not appear to be able to support acquisition prices which are as high as those for residential occupancy.

At the present time, it appears that residential conversion might be slightly less risky and provide an opportunity for higher acquisition price than office conversion. The demand for residential space in the downtown has increased dramatically in the past year; exacerbated, in part, by the limited number of areas where residential development is taking place. The demand for residential space currently translates into sales prices of about \$35,000/ unit in the Leather District. If minimal infra-

structure improvements are undertaken, letting the owner do the balance of the work, developers could afford to pay about \$8 per square foot. Given the high residential sales prices in the Waterfront and Back Bay, two or three times these projected Leather District sales prices and the relative ease of converting most Leather District property to residential occupancy, it appears that residential occupancy, once permitted by the Zoning Board of Appeals (see note), could lead to large-scale conversion and to significant inflation.

The conversion for office use could be competitive with residential occupancy (\$8 per square foot) assuming there was an equally strong demand for this use. But at the present time, the demand for ground floor retail and upper floor office use is not as competitive as that for residential conversion. This is demonstrated by the relatively large number of current proposals for residential or mixed office/residential conversion and the acquisition costs for this use vs. the relative lower acquisition price and interest in upgrading for conventional commercial occupancy.

Demand for manufacturing space in the Leather District is difficult to quantify. It is clear that the number of suitable buildings and the acquisition

prices which these firms (electronics, food processing) can afford are limited.

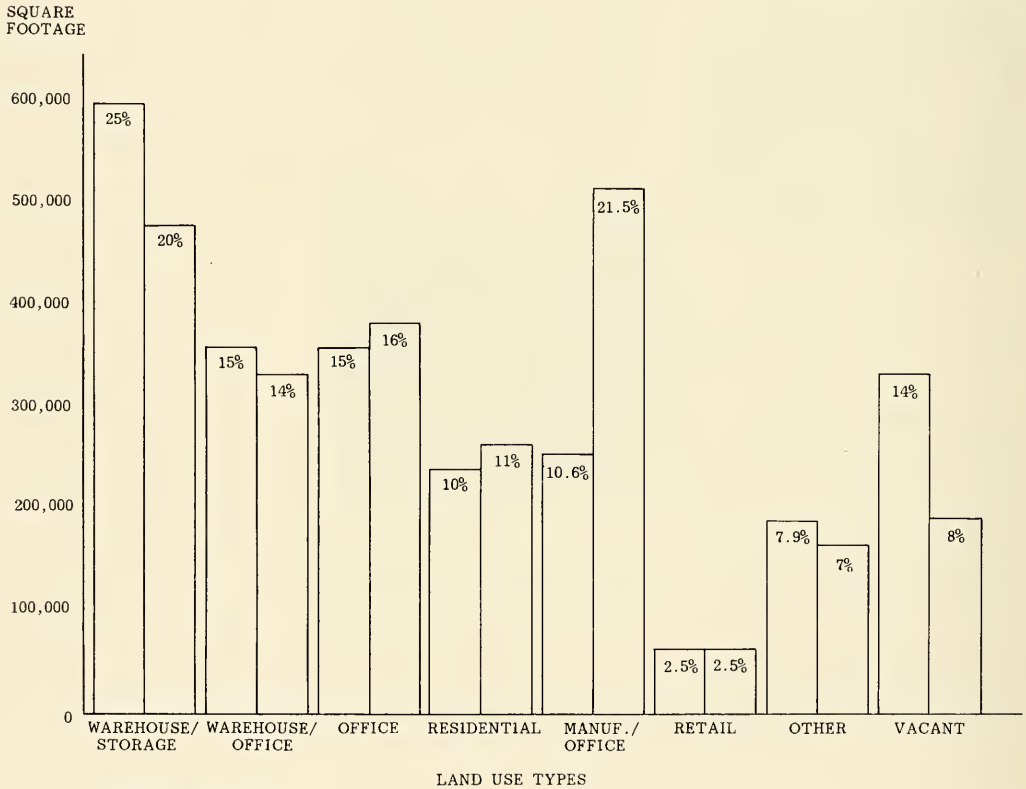
By establishing a City policy with respect to mixed residential occupancy, the uncertainties of the existing situation will be removed. Within the preservation area the market pressure will focus on mixed residential/ commercial, manufacturing or office use depending upon the recommended allocation of these uses. Likewise, market pressure for redevelopment will be limited to specific sites.



Note: The Leather District is part of an M-8 district (light manufacturing). Residential occupancy is a conditional use in this district.

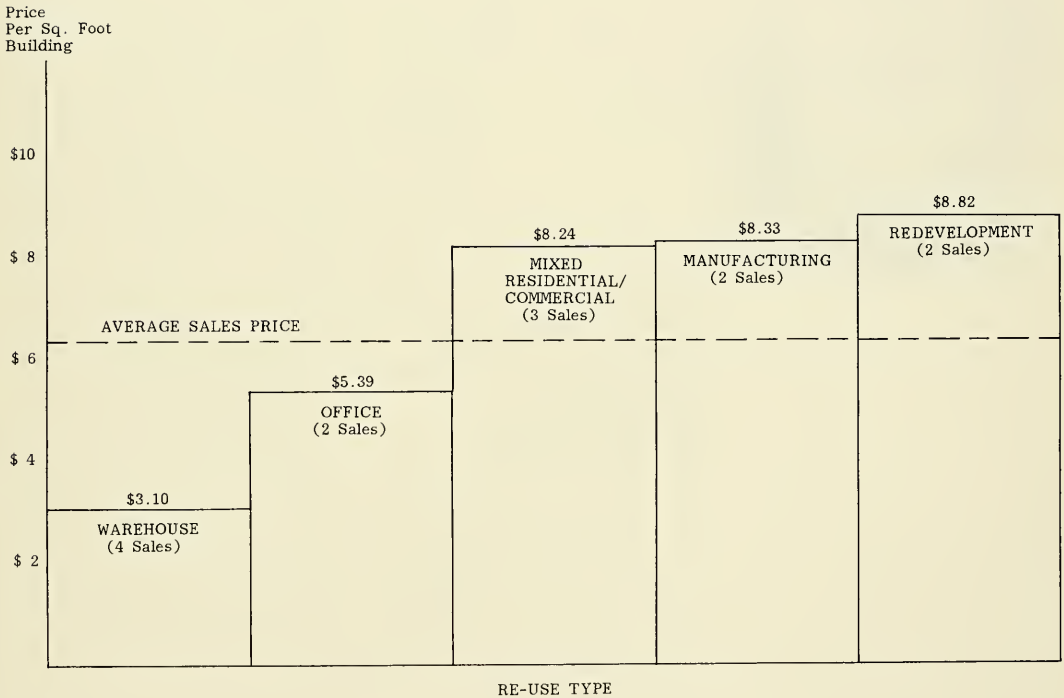


TABLE 3  
CHANGES IN PERCENTAGE/AMOUNT  
OF TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE\*  
ALLOCATED TO LAND USE TYPES  
IN LEATHER DISTRICT  
1976-1978



\*Total Estimated Square  
Footage is 2,424,000

TABLE 4  
AVERAGE ACQUISITION PRICE/RE-USE  
FOR LEATHER DISTRICT PROPERTY  
1971-1979



## Needs of the Chinese Community



2. NEEDS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY. Due to its limited land area and expanding population, Boston's Chinese community is seeking opportunities for both residential and commercial space in areas adjacent to Chinatown. The Leather District, in addition to the South End and Lower Washington Street, is an appropriate area offering opportunities for commercial and residential occupancy (see Map 5). The existing buildings can easily be converted to these uses. Thus, the Chinese community has an interest in preserving the Leather District buildings to meet their varied needs.

Recent ownership and occupancy changes, most particularly on Lincoln and Beach Streets, indicate the need for and ability of these buildings to accommodate Chinese-related manufacturing or retail uses. In this area, firms manufacturing fortune cookies and noodles as well as a restaurant supply house have opened.

The Chinese community also hopes that additional firms such as Advanced Electronics, which opened recently and purchased the former Barron Anderson Building on Atlantic Avenue, can establish firms manufacturing electronic components in the larger buildings in the District. Such industries can provide alternative employment opportunities to the community, which historically has depended on the garment industry and restaurants.

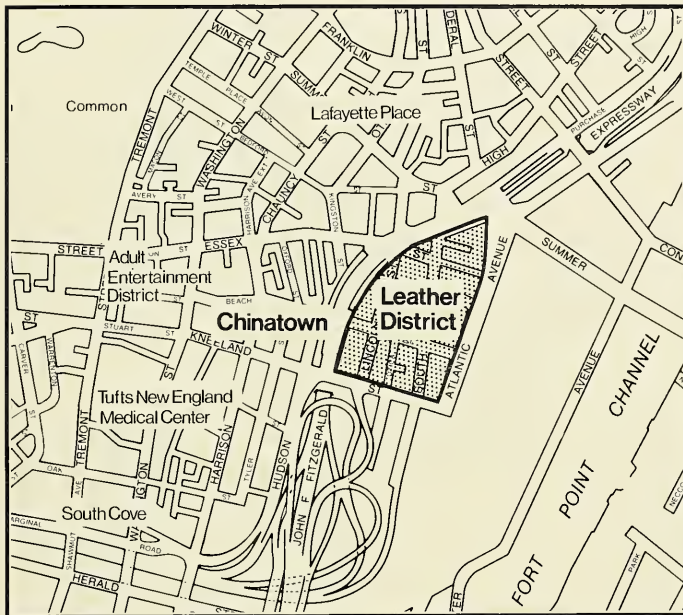
There is also a desire for residential occupancy in the Leather District. Upper floors would provide residential

space for the families of the merchants whose businesses are on the ground floor.

At the outset such occupancy would not be particularly attractive to elderly Chinese or low-income families with children because the services which these people need are mostly several blocks away near the Quincy School. However, once Chinese merchants and their families have settled in the Leather District, the area would be more hospitable to those Chinese with special needs. Further, the old Quincy School will eventually be rehabilitated for community use. Some human service agencies would be accommodated there, making them more accessible to Leather District residents.

An effort was made through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Neighborhood Strategies Area program to locate subsidized housing in the Leather District. However, no proposals were made because of the high acquisition and relocation costs, unavailability of suitable sites and environmental impacts of major traffic generators. As a consequence of this experience and the ongoing planning effort with Chinatown, the BRA will continue to pursue the possibilities of subsidized housing on land owned by itself as well as Tufts New England Medical Center.

Within the Leather District, efforts by the City to control the escalation in land values, preserve the existing buildings for commercial and mixed use, and encourage manufacturing enterprises would serve the needs of the Chinese community.



## 5 Chinatown: Expansion Districts

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## Preservation of the District's Physical Character



3. PRESERVATION OF THE DISTRICT'S PHYSICAL CHARACTER. The Leather District is one of the City's most intact and homogenous collections of 19th century commercial architecture. As such, this area merits preservation. A number of options exist for preserving the physical character of the area, ranging from the incentives for restoration to penalties for non-compliance. Selecting the most appropriate preservation tools will depend upon the revitalization strategy which is adopted for the District.

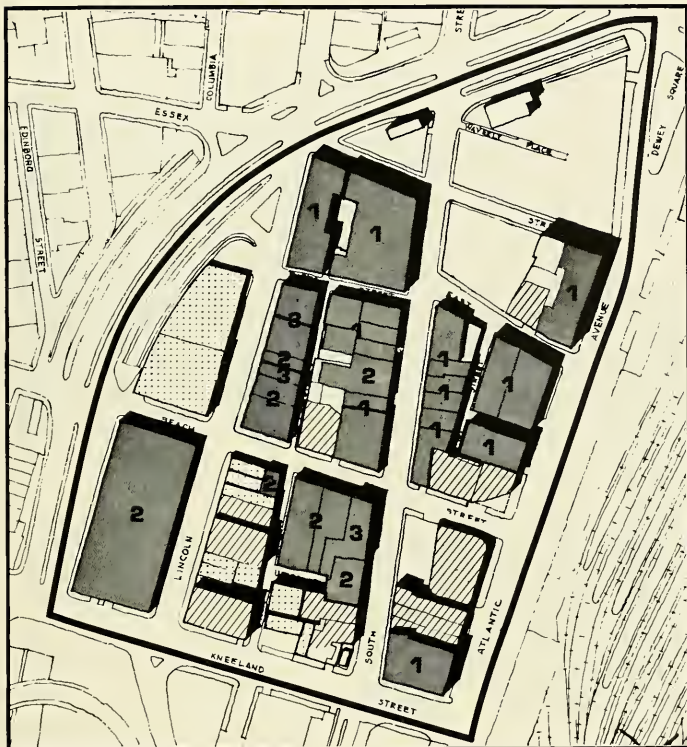
The Leather District buildings were constructed in rather rapid succession, primarily during the 1880s, by lesser known architects and builders (the two being the same in most cases). The influences of major Boston architectural firms, namely H.H. Richardson and Peabody and Stearns, is consistently evident. However, it was the requirements for efficient and economical manufacturing that dictated the predominant design scheme.

The leather industry and related wholesalers required space for display, offices, and work areas for warehousing, sorting and manufacture. Thus, a street floor was designed with huge display windows (at the time such size glass was only recently available) set in sturdy cast-iron piers or columns. Often, a high basement with windows was placed below these to allow for additional display.

Entrances were recessed to permit minimum setback and maximum floor area. Likewise, entrances were placed at the corner, when possible, to permit multi-directional access and less use of valuable floor space. The second floor was also given prominent windows with decorative stone or brick frames to identify the directors' offices. The next three or four floors were devoted to job work, production, or warehousing, and had a small honeycomb of uniformly arranged plain windows. The attic level (storage) was differentiated by a row of numerous small windows.

The result of this functional construction is a homogeneous district of five to six story, red brick, flat roofed structures set back uniformly with continuous floor levels, string courses, and cornice lines. In general, decoration on the earlier buildings is of rough-hewn brownstone or cut brick in Romanesque patterns. Later, decoration was done in light colored stone illustrating the newer Georgian Revival fashion.

A review of Map 6 indicates the results of an evaluation of the architectural noteworthiness of the particular buildings and spaces in the District. As is evident, with the exception of a few vacant parcels and replaceable buildings of which the Lincoln Street Garage is the major example, all properties reinforce a unique sense of scale and place and should therefore be retained and restored.



## 6 Preservation Characteristics



Significant Building

- 1 Architectural details intact
- 2 Quality remodeling at streetfront
- 3 Discordant remodeling of streetfront



Representative Building

Contributes to form and architectural image of the district



Replaceable Building

Interrupts form of block.  
Does not reinforce architectural image of the district



Vacant Parcel





TABLE 5  
PRESERVATION PROGRAMS: INCENTIVES/CONTROLS

<u>Incentives/Controls</u>	<u>Historic District Chapter 40C (State)</u>	<u>National Register of Historic Places (Federal)</u>	<u>Voluntary Review Board (City)</u>
Mandatory Design Review of Exterior Changes	X		
Historic District Committee	X		
Tax Benefits (IRS)	X	X	
Tax Disincentives (IRS) if Building Demolished	X	X	
Matching grant \$ available		X	
Federal Envir. Design Review process if bldg. impacted by federally funded actions	X	X	
Voluntary review of exterior changes			X
Zoning Variance- mandatory design review	X	X	X



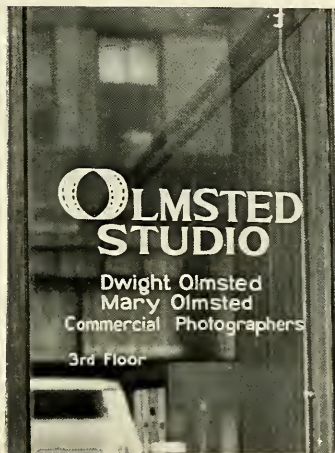
There are two primary clusters of buildings which together generate the sense of scale in the District. North of Beach Street most of the buildings are architecturally significant. South of Beach Street a large percentage of the buildings are identified as representative, i.e., they contribute to the form and image of the District but are of lesser architectural quality.



#### POSSIBLE PRESERVATION TOOLS.

Several preservation tools, programs, and incentives may be effective in the Leather District. None of these have an effect on or are affected by a building use. These tools or programs could be implemented individually or together. They range in scope from no effect on private property to voluntary participation in an advisory design review process to mandatory design review.

No specific tool or program is recommended for adoption at this time. All should be considered and evaluated for effect on the owners, the City, and preservation goals. The programs are summarized on Table 5 in terms of the controls and incentives. An example of a National Register District is Broad Street. The Back Bay and Beacon Hill Historic Districts were created by special state legislation but are similar to a state Chapter 40C District.



## Improving Circulation and Parking

4. IMPROVING CIRCULATION AND PARKING. Problems of parking and circulation are a critical concern to businessmen in the Leather District. A number of traffic improvements have been proposed to resolve these problems. If these improvements are implemented, they should substantially improve the commercial viability of the District. A number of properties with loading on Atlantic Avenue, on the other hand, will increasingly be impacted by Transportation Center-generated traffic.

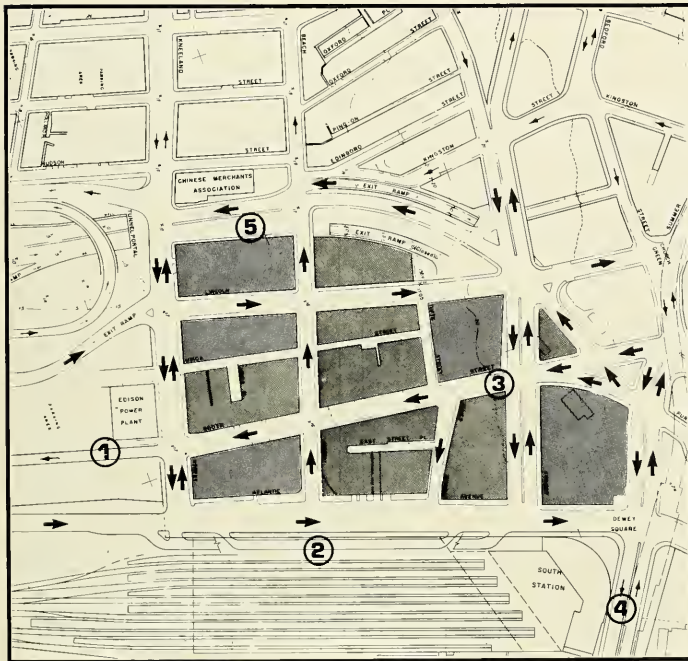


There are four major traffic and parking problems in the District. First, the convenient access which the Leather District has to the region's highways (Southeast Expressway and Massachusetts Turnpike) is often blocked by congestion at the ramp intersections on Kneeland Street and Dewey Square. The street intersection capacity is insufficient to accommodate the demand.

A second related traffic problem is the congestion caused by on-street loading with 50' trailer trucks of some of the warehouse buildings on Atlantic Avenue and South Street. These trucks park perpendicular to the buildings utilizing the street in order to deliver or receive goods. Traffic flow is seriously constricted as a consequence. Map 11 indicates the location of these loading docks.

The third issue concerns both on- and off-street parking. As in most commercial areas of the City, there is a limited supply relative to demand for parking. Even with good enforcement of the parking regulations there is often an inadequate supply.

The fourth problem pertains to the design of New Essex Street and its impact upon potential redevelopment parcels in Dewey Square. A consultant is being retained by the BRA to study this issue. As a part of this effort, the consultant will evaluate the impact upon the Leather District of widening Essex Street. He will also study the need for a coordinated public improvement program of street lighting, sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities, and the development potential of various parcels including the Lincoln Street Garage.



1. Turnpike ramps, entrance, exit
2. South Station  
auto/cars drop-off  
garage/bus terminal
3. New Essex Street
4. Summer Street
5. Surface Artery

## 7 Proposed Circulation and Parking Improvements

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A number of solutions have been proposed to resolve the preceding problem. Some of these are indicated on Map 7. Depending upon the implementation schedule, these improvements will require funding and scheduling over the next fifteen years.

The key circulation improvement in the Leather District is the construction of a new Turnpike ramp which would align with Atlantic Avenue (see improvement #1) and function in conjunction with Atlantic Avenue as a northbound exist. The entrance to the Turnpike would be from South Street which would be reversed and made a one-way southbound street. These improvements (a new Turnpike ramp and one-way pair street system) would relieve congestion at Kneeland Street and the Surface Artery by creating a second entry point to the Turnpike. It is estimated, furthermore, that traffic on South Street would be reduced 50% and shifted to the evening when the conflicts with truck loading would be lessened.

The second proposed improvement concerns the construction at South Station of a 2,000 car parking garage, an inter-city and intra-city bus terminal and an at-grade auto and bus drop-off.

The provision of a 2,000 car commuter parking facility would provide ample short- and long-term parking to serve the needs of the area's commercial tenants. Additionally, if the bus terminal and parking garage are constructed as is currently being evaluated with direct connections to and from the Turnpike and Expressway, congestion on the local streets will be minimized.

In conjunction with the South Station development and the one-way pairing of Atlantic Avenue and South Street is the proposed widening and construction of a new two-way Essex Street. This widened street would facilitate access and egress into and out of South Station. Several alternatives exist for the design of the intersection at Essex Street and the surface artery. The consultant study will evaluate these options.

Another related improvement is the closing of the northbound roadway of the Central Artery. This change would eliminate a lot of traffic which avoids congestion in the Artery tunnel by exiting at Kneeland Street and using South Street as a short-cut to avoid the Tunnel. This through traffic will be eliminated with a one-way southbound South Street and the closing of the northbound Surface Artery.



As is suggested, the improvements proposed to accompany the South Station development should resolve the parking and circulation problems of the Leather District. More parking will be available and access into and around the district will be facilitated. Loading activities relating to the buildings on Atlantic Avenue, on the other hand, will feel the impact of increased

traffic. Although there currently are no plans to narrow this street, the demand for local bus and auto drop-off will have the effect of limiting the use of this street by 50-foot trailer trucks. Plans for the future use of these properties should be developed which minimize the need for loading by large trailer trucks.



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## Upgrading City Services and Infrastructure

5. UPGRADE CITY SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE. The fifth issue which is of particular concern to property owners and tenants is the need to upgrade various facilities and City services to bring them in line with a more intensive pattern of land use.

Currently the Leather District's physical infrastructure reflects an orientation to warehousing and trucking land uses. There are minimal pedestrian scale amenities, lighting, trees, neckdowns, and major components of the infrastructure; water, sewers, and alleys need upgrading to conform to a more intensive land use pattern.

As suggested in the following concept plan (see Map 8), it is recommended that pedestrian amenities be constructed (trees, lighting), that the sidewalks be repaired, and that the alleys, water and sewer system be upgraded. A detailed plan and cost estimate for

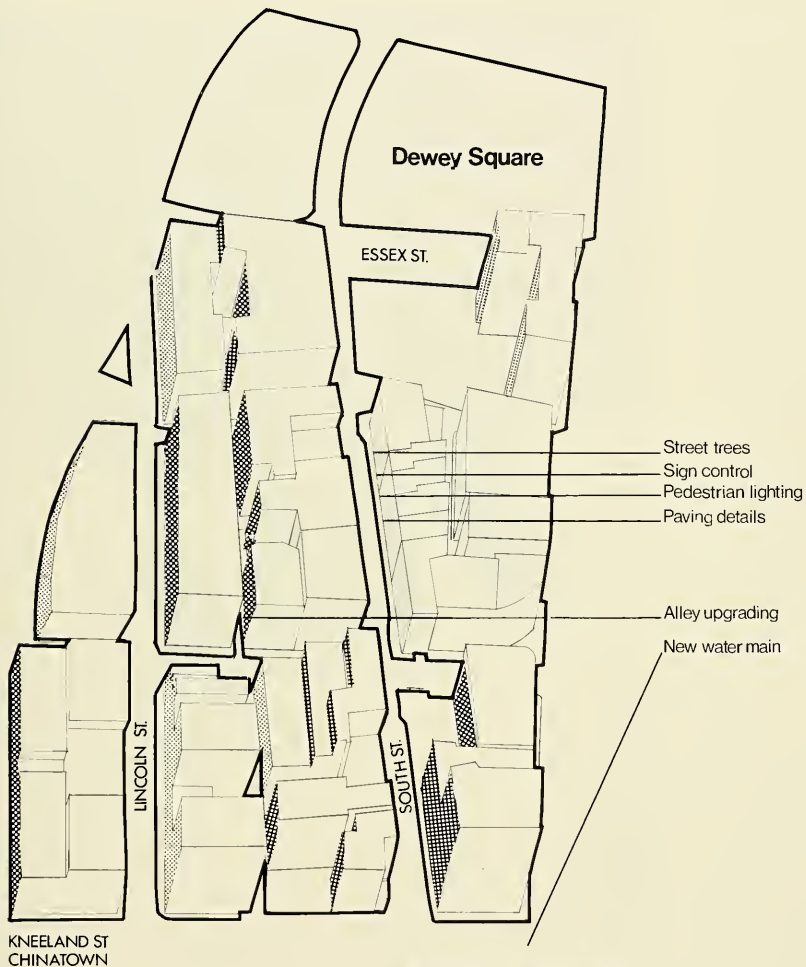
these infrastructure items will require agreement on a land use and circulation plan which identifies the type and intensity of land use and proposed circulation flow. General estimates of some of the priority items, on the other hand, have been identified as listed below:

New pedestrian	
scale lighting	\$ 250,000
Street trees	\$ 60,000
Water main	
replacement	\$ 125,000
--Kneeland Street	
from Expressway	
ramp to Atlantic	
Avenue	

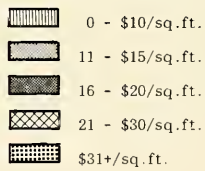
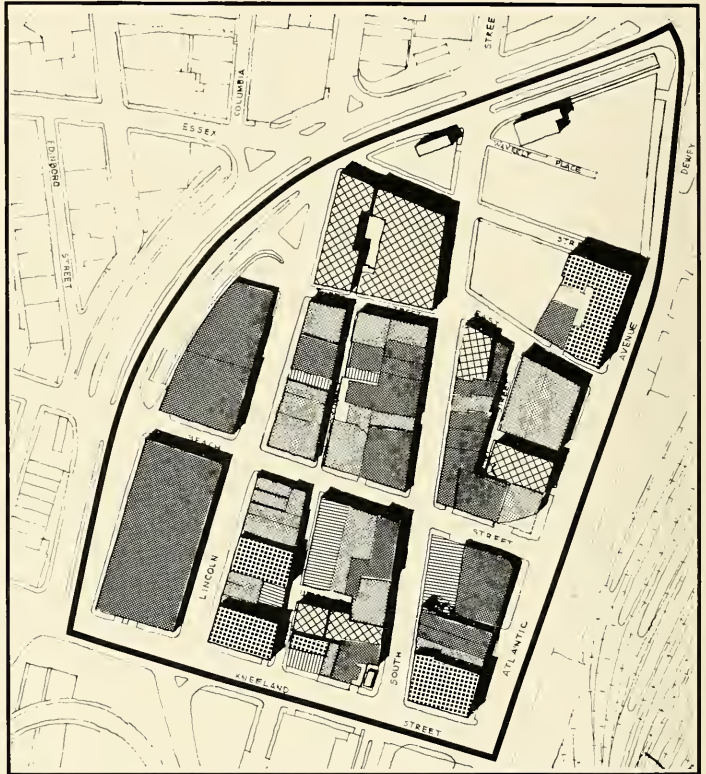
In addition to various infrastructure improvements are two other concerns which relate to various city government responsibilities: assessing and police protection.

The assessed valuation per square foot of land averages between \$11 and \$20 (Map 9). This assessment results in taxes of about \$.66 per square foot





## 8 Public Improvement Concept Plan



## 9 Assessed Valuation



or 25%-50% of the buildings revenues depending upon the tenancy. Often because of the generally higher assessments of older commercial property in the city, taxes of particular buildings in the Leather District amount to 40% or more of the building's income. With reclassification it is assumed that industrial buildings with excessively high assessments will be revalued on a more reasonable basis.

The interest in improved police coverage is a topic of increasing concern. By working together to prepare a concept land use plan there will be an opportunity to discuss appropriate strategies to deal with city service issues such as police coverage which are of importance in the district.

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## Alternative Land Use Strategies

B. ALTERNATIVE LAND USE STRATEGIES. Given the need for parking, circulation and various public improvements, the critical issue to be resolved is what revitalization strategy (i.e., mix of development and rehabilitation activities) and how many square feet of which uses (manufacturing, office and mixed residential/commercial) is most appropriate. In order to resolve this issue, three revitalization strategies, each with a varying mix of upgraded space and new development, have been identified: (1) Maximum, (2) Infill and (3) Minimum, Build and Reuse. For each of these strategies, the total number of square feet which could be utilized for mixed residential/commercial, office or manufacturing space has been identified and then evaluated in terms of the district's goals and demand for such space. On the basis of this analysis, a recommended revitalization strategy and mix of land uses is proposed.

A review of the existing land uses in the Leather District indicated that there are some 1 million square feet of space (Map 1, Table 6) now used for various types of warehousing and office purposes which could be upgraded with more intensive uses. While most of this space is located in buildings which merit preservation, some exists within

buildings which might be considered part of a potential site which would accommodate new construction.

The two infill sites (numbers 3, 4) located on Table 7 and Map 2 are hypothetical parcels which are a composite of vacant land, underutilized and/or architecturally insignificant buildings. Under the Maximum Build option the size of the parcels is more than double that of the Infill build alternative which assumes redevelopment of only those buildings deemed of lesser architectural importance.

The two development sites (number 1 and 2) identified on Table 7 and Map 2 are those sites which various BRA staff consider most appropriate for new development. Parcel number 1 is located at Dewey Square. It is cleared and new office development is anticipated. Parcel number 2 is the Lincoln Street garage. Because of the proposed parking facility at South Station and a closing of a portion of the surface artery, it is felt that this structure, of no particular architectural merit, would assume more value as a new office building site. The Maximum and Infill strategies contemplate redevelopment of both parcels. The Minimum Build option only contemplates the redevelopment of the Dewey Square parcel.

For each of these strategies, it is assumed that Infill and New Development would be for office purposes.

TABLE 6  
LEATHER DISTRICT SPACE AVAILABLE FOR REUSE 1978

Use	Estimated Square Footage*	Taxes	Jobs**
Warehouse/Storage	500,000		100
Warehouse/Office	368,000		733
Mixed Residential/ Commercial	40,000		--
Vacant	183,000		--
TOTAL	1,091,000	\$720,060	833

\* Based on Table 3.

\*\* Based on Table 6.  
(Taxes assume \$.66/sf.)

TABLE 7  
REVITALIZATION SCENARIOS  
SQUARE FOOTAGE AVAILABLE FOR LAND USE ALTERNATIVES

Land Use Alternative	Maximum Build and Re-Use (Sq.Ft.)	Infill Build and Re-Use (Sq.Ft.)	Minimum Build and Re-Use (Sq.Ft.)
NEW DEVELOPMENT			
1. Dewey Square - 48,747	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
2. Garage - 28,400	550,000	550,000	
INFILL DEVELOPMENT			
3. Kneeland/Lincoln*	1,000,000	200,00	
4. Atlantic Avenue**	350,000	50,000	
Total	2,900,000	1,800,000	1,000,000
REUSE OF SPACE (Alternatives)			
	651,000	934,000	1,091,000
Mixed Residential	290 units	417 units	487 units
Commercial	215,000	308,000	360,000
Office Class B/C	651,000	934,000	1,091,000
Manufacturing	651,000	934,000	1,091,000
Total New & Rehab	3,551,000	2,734,000	2,091,000

\* Parcel size under Max. Build - 50,000 sq.ft.  
Infill Build - 25,000 sq.ft.

\*\* Parcel size under Max. Build - 18,000 sq.ft.  
Infill Build - 7,000 sq.ft.

The amount of space for New Development would increase directly with the intensity of development, i.e., the Maximum Build option would provide 2.9m square feet (2 development and 2 infill parcels), Infill 1.8m (2 development and 2 small infill parcels) and the Minimum Build, 1m square feet (1 development parcel and no infill).



By contrast, in terms of the reuse of space, the total amount of square footage available for upgrading decreases as the amount of infill development increases. In other words, the estimated floor space available for reuse under each option is: (a) Minimum 1,091,000 sq.ft., (b) Infill 934,000 sq.ft., and (c) Maximum 651,000 sq.ft.

In total, therefore, the square footage available for Build and Reuse ranges between 3.551m sq.ft. (Maximum), 2.734m sq.ft. (Infill), and 2.091m sq.ft. (Minimum).

These square footage estimates are needed to carry out a cost/benefit analysis of the taxes and jobs generated by the various land use strategies. Table 7 identifies for the reuse of space the amount of square footage which would be available if this conversion was for either mixed residential/commercial, Class B/C office or manufacturing. This square footage is then used in conjunction with Table 8 to identify the number of jobs and taxes which would result from each of these land uses. Table 9 identifies the taxes and jobs generated by each land use strategy and mix of land uses.



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## Evaluation



C. EVALUATION. An evaluation of alternative land use strategies and possible land uses must take into account the extent to which they achieve the goals for the district, as well as their feasibility. As is clear from an evaluation of the alternatives, the most appropriate revitalization strategy is that which includes renovated space for a mix of land uses, as well as a number of sites for new office development.

GOALS. Three central goals have been identified for the Leather District: Economic Growth, Neighborhood Preservation and Balanced Development. These goals provide a set of standards against which the various alternatives can be evaluated in terms of both quantitative and qualitative factors (Table 1).

TABLE 8  
ESTIMATING TAXES/JOB'S FOR ALTERNATIVE LAND USES

PERMANENT JOBS/USE	Sq.Ft./Employee
Office: Class C rehabilitation	175
New Construction	200
Retail	325
Manufacturing/warehousing	500
Residential	1 job/20 units
TAXES	
Office	
Class C -- assume \$6/sf rent, taxes at 30% gross.	
Class A -- assume \$12/sf rent; taxes at 30% gross.	
Retail -- assume \$6/sf rent; taxes at 30% gross.	
Manufacturing/warehousing -- assume \$3.50/sf rent; taxes at 30% of gross	
Residential -- assume 1,500 sf/unit	
\$2,500 taxes/unit	

TABLE 9  
IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES LAND USES STRATEGIES UPON  
TAX RETURN TO CITY AND JOBS

Land Use Alternatives	Maximum Build and Reuse	Infill Build and Reuse	Minimum Build and Reuse
New Office Construction			
Square Feet:	2,900,000	1,800,000	1,000,000
Taxes:	\$10,400,000	\$6,500,000	\$3,600,000
Jobs:	14,500	9,000	5,000
Reuse (square feet)	651,000	934,000	1,091,000
Taxes			
Manufacturing:	\$ 700,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,150,000
Office:	1,200,000	1,700,000	2,000,000
Mixed R/C:	1,000,000	1,400,000	1,600,000
Jobs			
Manufacturing:	1,302	1,868	2,182
Office:	3,702	5,337	6,234
Mixed R/C:	675	967	1,131

NOTE: Assumptions for estimating taxes and jobs indicatd on Table 8.

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The goals pertaining to economic growth highlight the desire to promote building conversion for office, manufacturing and mixed residential/commercial activity as well as new development to provide the economic growth and jobs which will reinforce the adjacent downtown and South Station development projects.

Table 9 identifies (on basis of ratios described in Table 8) for each of the land uses the number of jobs and taxes which the various alternatives are projected to generate. Office occupancy provides the both new construction and rehabilitated space the greatest number of permanent jobs. Manufacturing occupancy, on the other hand, provides jobs which meet the labor skills of the adjacent population. Although the employment totals are below that of office occupancy, this use should, therefore be encouraged.

In terms of taxes, new hi-rise office development, because of the density, provides significantly more taxes than rehabilitated space. But, amongst the reuses of rehabilitated space, the mixed residential/commercial occupancy generates about a similar amount of tax revenue as Class B/C office use. Mixed residential/commercial use therefore should be encouraged.

The pursuit of economic growth goals if followed to the exclusion of other concerns leads to negative economic and social impacts. Economic growth, therefore, must be shaped by the need to preserve the physical and commercial character of the area.

Balancing the needs of economic growth and neighborhood preservation requires a comprehensive development program. Existing space should be used more intensively. Selective redevelopment should take place and a mix of uses should be encouraged.

FEASIBILITY. The second criteria of concern in evaluating the alternatives is the feasibility of the reuse options. Identification of a revitalization strategy must reflect the demand for and marketability of a particular land use.

The BRA Research Department is presently in the process of quantifying the demand for various land uses in the Downtown. The preliminary figures which are discussed below provide a context against which one can measure the proposed magnitude of space for a given use in the Leather District.

The demand for office space in the Downtown is identified on Table 10 which indicates some 6,555,000 square feet of new construction in the next 12 years and 1,252,500 square feet of Class B and C space over the next five years. These figures were generated in part from a recent BRA survey of 500 office tenants. (The Office Industry, Part II, Page 73). The respondents indicated in this survey that of six secondary office locations in the Downtown (Map 10), the South Station area next to Broad Street and the Waterfront was the most desirable.

TABLE 10  
OFFICE SPACE ABSORPTION RATES  
(IN THOUSANDS OF SQUARE FEET)  
1978-1990

1978	79	80	81	82	sub totals	1983	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	sub totals
Class A New Construction														
351	351	351	351	351	1755	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	4800
Class B Rehabilitation														
62	62	62	62	62	310	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Class C Rehabilitation														
188	188	188	188	188	940	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1978-82 sub total					3005	1983-90 sub total								4800

Total Demand for 1978-90 is Projected as:  $\begin{matrix} 3005 \\ + 4800 \\ \hline 7805 \end{matrix}$

New Construction      6555

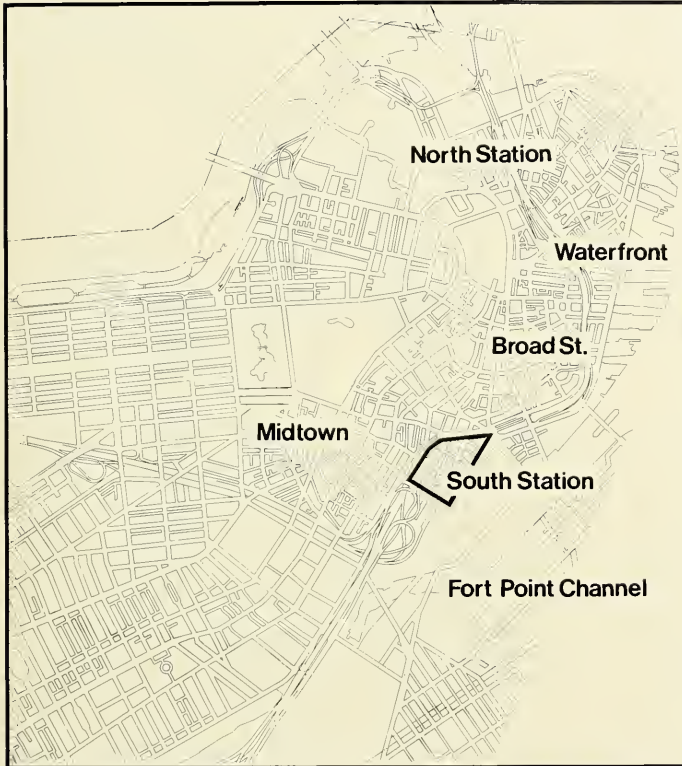
Rehabilitation          1250

BRA staff are currently evaluating the supply of sites for new office construction and conversion. The preliminary results of this survey indicate a limited supply of well located space for office conversion as well as parcels for new development. The South Station area is considered a good office location so that an effort should be made to retain space appropriate for conversion to Class B/C as well as sites for new development of Class A office use.

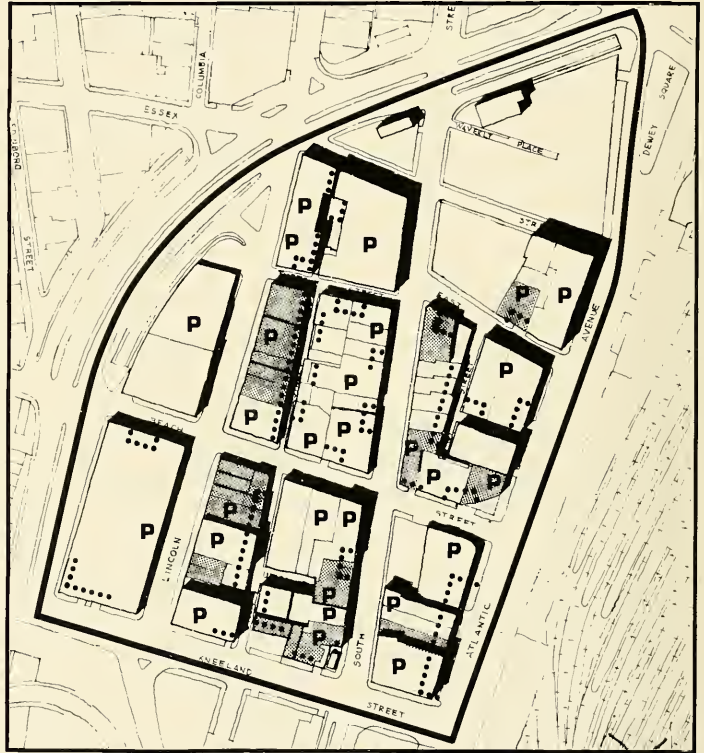
The demand for manufacturing space has been identified as 3.8 million square feet over the next 10 years. Much of


this demand will be satisfied in various public projects: Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston Marine Industrial Park, Crosstown Industrial Park. The balance of this demand will have to be provided for in locations such as the Leather District which have convenient access to public transit, the airport and a pool of semi-skilled labor.

The demand for residential occupancy in the Downtown has not been quantified but is significant. Condominium conversion in Back Bay, Beacon Hill and Waterfront, apartment up-grading in the North End, and the limited amount of new construction have increased the market for residential use.



**10 Potential Office  
Locations**



- P** Passenger Elevator
- ..... Loading Dock
-  Buildings Under 5,000 sq.ft.

## 11 Building Infrastructure



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Residential occupancy in the Leather District has taken several forms including artist loft rental and condominium, and loft condominium. The ground levels, basement and first floors, are utilized for retail space and the upper floors are either a mix of residential and commercial tenants, or reserved solely for residential use.

The demand for various land uses must also be calculated in terms of the average sales price which the different land uses have been able to pay for Leather District space. Table 4 indicates the range of prices for the 13 sales between 1971 and 1979. A comparison of sales prices to demand indicate that while there is a significant projected demand for office conversion, the sales prices for buildings for this reuse have been below that of mixed residential/ commercial, manufacturing and office redevelopment. Additionally, two of the three most recent sales have been for mixed residential/commercial use indicating the significant interest in this use. In fact, given the demand/sales prices for residential units today in the Downtown, it would seem that this use is the most marketable strategy today. But with, on the other hand, the proposed office development at Dewey Square and the construction of a transportation terminal at South Station, the commercial importance of the district will significantly improve.

Evaluating the land use strategies in terms of the criteria, goals, demand and sales prices, indicates the problems with the Maximum and Minimum Build options. The Maximum Build option would result in a number of development parcels which exceed the projected demand for office space. The development of towers on these sites would, furthermore, destroy the scale and character of the District. By contrast, the Minimum Build option would not provide sufficient tax and job generating uses and would preserve underutilized commercial space in excess of the demand.

The Infill Build option provides an optimum mix of building space for reuse as well as sites for new development.

The balance of space to be upgraded is recommended for office and manufacturing, 40% of the demand for Class B/C office space over the next five years and 7% of the demand for manufacturing space over the next 10 years. While this is a large percentage of the total demand for Class B/C office use, much of the space considered as possible for reuse is currently occupied. The existing tenants and owners will continue to utilize the space for its present purposes. Thus of the total of 504,000 square feet, only a percentage will be available for new tenants.



Sites for new development if built at densities compatible with the scale of the District would fulfill 27% of the demand for new office space over the next 15 years. Given the limited availability of other sites in the Downtown, this is an appropriate amount of new office construction.

Mixed residential/commercial occupancy would provide approximately 80 dwelling units, 16% of the potential number of units (487) which could possibly be created if all feasible buildings in the District were converted. The limited amount of space proposed, on the other hand, will insure the preservation of properties of lower commercial value without dramatically altering the commercial character of the District. Mixed residential commercial use would be restricted to buildings under 5,000 sq. ft. in size without passenger elevators as shown in Map 11.







